TESTIMONY OF THE
DEPARTMENT OF INLAND FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE

BEFORE THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON INLAND FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE

IN OPPOSITION TO L.D. 599

AN ACT TO REVIEW POSSIBLE EXPANSION OF DIP NET FISHING IN NORTHERN MAINE

SPONSORED BY: Representative THERIAULT of Madawaska

CO-SPONSORED BY: Representative AYOTTE of Caswell
Senator JACKSON of Aroostook
Representative LONG of Sherman
Representative McELWEE of Caribou
Representative SAUCIER of Presque Isle
Representative SHAW of Standish
Representative TURNER of Burlington
Representative WILLETTE of Mapleton

DATE OF HEARING: March 26, 2013

Good afternoon Senator Dutremble, Representative Shaw and members of the Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Committee. I am Michael Brown, Fisheries Division Director at the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, speaking on behalf of the Department, in opposition to **L.D. 599**.

L.D. 599, a concept bill, will require the Department to consider reopening dip net fisheries for smelts in streams within Aroostook County that are currently closed to the taking of smelts.

In 2001, the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries Wildlife and various public working groups developed a 15-year species plan for smelt management. This plan addressed a number of issues concerning the ways which we manage utilization smelts, including forage for game fish, commercial harvest, and recreational fishing. During this time we opened several new smelt waters to dip net and commercial bait fishing.

There are two primary reasons for the closures of streams to spring dipping: (1) to protect smelt populations for use as forage, and (2) to address increasing public relations issues. Even though bag limits are in place to restrict harvest, fishery managers are still very concerned about possible impacts from spring dipping activities. The spring dip net

fishery focuses on spawning fish which are concentrated and highly vulnerable in the spawning tributaries. Smelt populations are particularly vulnerable to over-harvest due to their spawning behavior. Dipping activities can result in future year class failures due to excessive harvest prior to spawning, interference and/or blockage of smelt spawning activities, and increased egg mortalities through siltation and direct physical damage due to wading anglers.

Our management priorities for the smelt resources in Maine remain:

1. Maximize supply available as forage for salmonids, particularly landlocked salmon and lake trout, within the context of management objectives for those species.

2. Maintain and/or increase recreational fishing opportunities.

3. Maintain and/or improve the supply of smelts available for the commercial fishery.

I would be glad to answer any questions at this time or during the work session.